

## SLAs - The Pillars of Service Level Management

Chris Fowler, ITSM Consultant at Richmond Systems, gives a five-point guide on how to best manage your SLAs for optimum SLM

Service Level Agreements have gradually been adopted into UK offices and are seen as an essential way of providing support for small and medium-sized businesses. Service Level Management however should be seen as nothing more than the proper management of effective SLAs. Yet it is often the case that the data taken from SLAs is left stagnant, leaving an office with an ineffective, unfulfilled and unmanaged promise.

SLAs are the link between IT performance and business goals. Yet without the proper management of SLAs in Service Level Management, IT managers are forced to try and guess office requirements and expectations of service levels. This guesswork can often result in overstaffing and over-provisioning. By implementing an SLA, the guesswork, and associated costs, can be kept to a minimum, resulting in financial savings for the business.

In this article, I will discuss how to best manage the information that smaller organisations can get from their SLAs, in order to maximise the benefits. The key to managing any Service Level Management strategy well, and the SLAs that support it, can be simplified in five steps:

### Step One: develop a business plan for why your organisation needs a SLM review

Without assessing what business goals you expect to achieve, you will be unable to evaluate effective Service Level Management. Therefore it is vital to assess which departments are most in need of review and what you hope the return on the investment to be.

### Step Two: take small steps.

Concentrate on gathering one SLAs data and understand how that is working, rather than trying to assess the effectiveness of the entire company's SLAs.

For example, if one of the company SLAs is to respond to IT support calls within two hours; look into the data that the SLA generates. When are you receiving the majority of these calls? Are there reoccurring topics that are not being addressed? Crucially, are the calls being returned within the two hours as determined by the SLA?

Once you have gathered this information, you are then able to take the necessary changes to manage your services better. This might include having more staff available to answer messages at certain times of the day, or solving the reoccurring IT problem a particular department is facing.

### Step Three: audit your staff.

Speaking to staff about which Service Level Agreements are working for them and which ones are not is an integral step towards best practice Service Level Management.

Many small-and medium-sized businesses take an executive decision when implementing Service Level Agreements, yet there can be no substitute for the feedback of staff on the ground, who are dealing with issues on a daily basis. Unilateral feedback and analysis on the effectiveness of Service Level Agreements by staff will allow the company to adapt existing Service Level Agreements which are not as effective as they could be.

For example, the board might require that Blackberrys are fixed within two hours, yet printers must be fixed in two days. The impact on staff who are solely dependant on printers, but not Blackberrys would be huge.

In other words, learn from the experience of your personnel!

### Step Four: isolate the office champions.

Company SLAs are often implemented and the budget decided, yet left to flounder because they are not tracked and managed sufficiently. To solve this, deploy an existing staff member to take responsibility for them.

This staff member will be able to enforce steps two and three and be the brains behind effective Service Level Management. They will also be able to argue the necessary financial backing to add further Service Level Agreements and any associated costs they may incur. Without having someone to take ownership, SLAs will quickly become ineffective, outdated and useless.

### Step Five: communicate the benefits

Once the SLA has been implemented, you need to decide how you intend to measure the benefits. This may be looking for shorter response times, less staff resources or increased work productivity levels.

Once the intended measurement has been agreed on, you will be able to continually assess whether the SLA is fulfilling these objectives, and if it is not, you can adapt them so that the office Service Level Management is at its most effective.